

Mercy And Justice

Mercy Triumphs Over Judgment

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We live in a world that is not only inequitable but very harsh in its judgments. I am not stating anything that you do not already know through experience. Today, all we have to do is look at the decisions of judges in the world's court systems to see the suffering they cause. Their pronouncements of penalties give people years in prison for cruelty to animals, yet they give suspended sentences—or no sentences at all—to celebrity murderers and child molesters. In fact, just this week several people swimming with seals may be fined thousands of dollars for scaring them. We see ridiculous judgments being passed not only in this nation, but also in the world.

Judges and juries will heavily fine people in certain parts of the U.S. and Britain for so-called "hate speech" against Muslims and homosexuals yet overlook the hate speech toward Christians, even when it calls for their destruction and removal from society.

Isaiah 59:8 The way of peace they have not known, and there is no justice in their ways; They have made themselves crooked paths; Whoever takes that way shall not know peace.

It is the nature of human beings to make harsh judgments against one another. It is also in our nature to be partial and unfair to others. We speak harsh words to someone who merely says something we do not like, or we may harshly reprimand a child for not cleaning up his room. Then we, as a society, turn around and show mercy on the murderer or child molester who claims his parents mistreated him, causing him to commit this heinous crime. Everywhere we turn we see injustices and lack of mercy. The word of God makes no exceptions whatsoever! Everyone is commanded to be merciful, but it must be accompanied by true justice.

Zechariah 7:8-11 Then the word of the LORD came to Zechariah, saying, "Thus says the LORD of hosts: 'Execute true justice, show mercy and compassion everyone to his brother. Do not oppress the widow or the fatherless, the alien or the poor. Let none of you plan evil in his heart against his brother.' But they refused to heed, shrugged their shoulders, and stopped their ears so that they could not hear."

We see there that Israel purposely did not want to hear this command from God. They knew that it was the right way to treat people but they refused to heed. They shrugged their shoulders and had a total disregard for whatever God said. Here we see that God commands everyone to execute true justice and demonstrate mercy and compassion to others. Judgment must be tempered with mercy in order for there to be true justice. "Mercy triumphs over judgment," and in the day of judgment, the person who has shown mercy to others has even helped his own situation with regard to sin.

In its strictest sense, *justice* means "to strictly render that which is due," whether it reward or punishment, and to do so with impartial or unbiased judgment. However, the world is known for its injustices and for its unfairness. These have flowed over into the societies of the world from the families. Children are not taught to be just and merciful.

Sometimes it helps to look at the antonym of a word to get the real meaning. Let us take a moment to analyze the opposite of justice, which is injustice! We will look at two common injustices seen in families and in the workplace that most of us probably just overlook:

Injustice #1: Unequal Compensation for the Same Efforts.

We can see injustices in work situations where a stingy employer fails to pay a person what he justly deserves. He may extract everything he can from him and then pay just enough to meet the standards of the law. This type of person is guilty of injustice in his dealings with others in that he has not given what is justly due. I Corinthians 9:9 quotes Deuteronomy 25:4 saying, "You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain." This applies both physically and spiritually to our efforts, and it gives us hope of justice.

On the other hand, a person can be unjust if he compensates a person with more than he deserves. This can be especially true in a family where the father may feel too generous towards his children and give them a lot more than they deserve for services performed. If this happens often, it will give the child an unrealistic picture of life and the worth of his efforts; the father is therefore being unjust to that child by showing him partiality.

Unfairness can also be seen when we show favoritism in giving compensation for services performed. For example, two men may perform equal service and yet one may be compensated with advancement, honor, or pay to exceed the other man. This may be due to favoritism. He may be more worldly wise than the other man, and as a result, wins special consideration that he does not deserve. To be guilty of favoritism, which the Bible calls partiality, is unfair. A just man will compensate each man according to his

deeds and is not swayed by superficial efforts.

This same favoritism can be observed at home, between two children. In this case, the father is partial to one child, often the oldest, youngest, or one for which he has special liking. He gives this child special privileges or rewards, which demonstrates unfairness towards his other children. Thus, "unequal compensation for the same efforts" can be a form of injustice.

Injustice # 2: Equal Compensation for Differing Efforts.

There is often a tendency to reward two or more people equally whether they all deserve it or not. For example, one person may put forth a great deal more effort and be deserving of extra compensation; but in our misguided kindness towards everyone, we may make the mistake of rewarding them all equally. In fact, to some, *justice* wrongly means "equating." We really see this in our society today, where everyone is supposed to receive the same pay for the same type of job, regardless of the effort put forth.

This is the attitude of a socialistic type of government that claims a high regard for all humanity by distributing the wealth of the country. Redistribution of wealth has long been a goal of the Globalists. They ignore the principle of justice in which people are compensated according to their efforts, but they are injured rather than helped when they receive something for nothing for long periods of time. I am not talking about charity to help someone in need; that is for a limited time. I am talking about far-reaching, long-term compensation to individuals who do not lift a finger to do any work.

Sometimes, there is a tendency for a man to equate rewards in his family, where he loves all of his children the same and does not want to see any of them disappointed. For example, a daughter wants a car. She saves for it for months, denying herself entertainment and pleasures so that she can have the car. When she buys it, her younger sister, seeing the car, also wants one very badly. However, she has not been frugal with her money. She spent it all on clothes, perfume, hair stylists, and other pleasures. Her parents, in their desire to see both girls happy, buy the younger girl a similar car. This is a great injustice to the older daughter who had justly earned the car by her own labor. The girl that was given the car without working for it was shown a great injustice that would affect her for possibly the remainder of her life. The harm in rewarding the spendthrift and denying her the natural experience of disappointment is obvious. There are times when the only way a lesson can be learned is to suffer the consequences. It is not necessarily merciful to try to make all things equal.

This same equal compensation propaganda is often seen in youth sports. The children

compete in games and contests where a prize is offered to the winner; but the officials, in an effort to see that no one is disappointed, reward each child—regardless of his effort—with a prize. By doing this, they give a distorted picture of life. Children must be taught by experience that rewards are for those who earn them and that those who do not, go without. They must learn to enjoy another person's success and to endure their own disappointment as a normal experience of life. As a result, they will be given a more realistic picture of justice and that too much mercy can have adverse effects.

There is great harm that comes from equal compensation for differing efforts. It destroys incentive to earnestly strive for a goal that will bring personal rewards. Equate, and you destroy incentive. This is the failure with socialistic types of government that take from the rich and give to the poor. It creates a society of people who are inefficient, lazy, and freeloaders.

To illustrate this: You are walking down the street and a homeless person asks you for a dollar, and you give it to him. The next day and the same thing happens, and you give him another dollar. He is appreciative of it the second day; but after a while, maybe a few weeks, if you stop giving him that dollar, he will hate you because he expects it and does not have to work for it.

This principle is in no way in conflict with the Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard in Matthew 20:1-16. They each received a denarius regardless of how long they had worked. That was an act of mercy for men who wanted to work. They were not freeloaders. Part of this injustice in being "merciful" or being very giving on a long-term basis is that you cause the person to begin to rely on that charity without helping him to pick himself up by his bootstraps.

In reviewing justice, it is well to note that money and goods that are inherited are not in the same category as the injustices we are talking about. Those who inherit wealth are not being paid for services. Inheritances are given as gifts, a tradition in which a father leaves his family that which he has accumulated, with the thought that they are to become stewards of the family possessions. There may be benefits and problems attached to this tradition, but it is not considered injustice. Thus, "equal compensation for differing efforts" can be a form of injustice.

Justice is to carry out punishments according to that which is due. For example, suppose an employee has failed to follow instructions and, as a result, has caused great difficulty for many people involved. He may have assembled some equipment wrong or failed to follow through on an important job. As another example, suppose a child has committed a bad deed and injured another child in the process. In either case, how

should the employer or father bring justice to bear?

First, he should make sure that the person involved understood the instructions or what was expected of him; otherwise, the employer or parent could make an unfair judgment without the whole story. Second, he should find out all of the facts involved. This may not be easy. Usually those giving details are so prejudiced in their own viewpoint that the story they give is highly colored. It may be given in a moment of exaggerated emotion, hurt, disappointment, or hope. You cannot just rely on one witness as far as what happened or what was involved. Third, after a man has found out all of the true facts, if possible, he should free himself from any feeling of partiality or prejudice towards the guilty person; otherwise, he will likely make an unfair judgment. In one sense, God is the only real perfect Judge, because He can see the hearts of men.

The employer must also make certain that he has not expected too much from the employee. He should not be expected to perform way beyond what a normal man can be expected to perform in that given circumstance. In the case of a child, he should not be expected to perform beyond the capacity of his years. The parent may have expected scholastic achievement he probably would not produce himself under similar circumstances.

To make a fair judgment of the offense and determine just punishment, a person has to take at least four basic steps:

- 1) He must be sure the guilty person understood what was expected of him.
- 2) He must discover all of the facts.
- 3) He must have freed himself from partiality or prejudice.
- 4) He must be sure he has not expected more than was fair.

After taking these steps, he is then prepared to make a fair judgment of the offense and determine just punishment. Whatever the punishment, justice requires payment for the deed. If a child steals something, even if it is of little monetary value, he should be required to return or replace the article and be punished for breaking the Eighth Commandment. That is a very serious infraction of God's law.

When it is necessary to carry out severe punishment or a stern reprimand, it is always wise to follow up immediately with a demonstration of love or kindness towards the offender. If it is a child, he must know that you are not an opponent or enemy who wishes to do him harm but are moved by love and concern for his welfare and personal development. This principle also applies in dealing with employees.

There is a tendency for some men to be too firm and unrelenting in punishment, especially with children. This is often due to uncontrolled anger that causes a man to temporarily lose his judgment and become excessively harsh. To prevent this, we must develop humility, allowing for human weaknesses. This will properly soften our spirit, and we will carry out punishment for the benefit of the offender rather than as an escape for our own anger.

The permissive attitude of so many men today tends towards softness in discipline rather than firmness. This is seen in the working world where a man may think he is too busy to deal in complete justice with his employees. Many injustices result throughout the working world.

Because of love or tenderness, a man may be too soft in dealing with his children. Such emotional feelings tend to obscure the child's errors. When the child is involved in a conflict with other children, his son or daughter is almost always innocent in his or her father's eyes. If such a father does acknowledge his child's offense, he may overlook it or let him get off with a minimum of punishment. This softness can injure a child permanently and make him unprepared for the firm life ahead where society will deal both justly and unjustly with him in less favorable circumstances. It is the right of the child to be punished in justice for his offenses by someone who loves him. That prepares him for the world that is coming.

Some may justify softness by calling it mercy. Because they do not understand this principle, they may feel they are obligated to be lenient in punishment, if not to forego it altogether. This may be right if the mistake was made in innocence or if the offender is sincerely repentant, acknowledges his mistake, and asks forgiveness. However, this is not so often the case. Usually there is a justification for actions, a defense and tendency to blame others. If the offender does not show forth a sufficiently humble and repentant attitude, then justice must bring him to task. We see the result of justice not bringing a person to task in this society. We have many people who have repeatedly committed horrendous acts against others and yet they are out in society continuing to commit those acts.

Mercy should not rob justice, and there are many offenses for which one must repay even in the face of a sincerely repentant attitude. We realize that in our own spiritual lives. We may be sincerely repentant of something that we have done in the way of sin, but often God will allow us to suffer from the result of that sin. Sometimes it is not only we that suffer, but this can carry over to the third and fourth generation. Mercy embraces both forgiveness for the guilty and compassion for the suffering and the needy.

Conflict between brethren can easily turn into such an offense that it may cause them to falter in their spiritual lives. This is why Jesus Christ is precise in explaining how we should forgive others. He illustrated the principle of forgiveness and mercy upon a fellow human being with His underlying example of God's forgiveness toward His human creation in the parable of the unforgiving servant, recorded in Matthew 18. Jesus commends the forgiving attitude and condemns the unmerciful. In Matthew 18:21-35, Jesus illustrates the answer to Peter's question, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?" The general thrust of Jesus' parable of the unmerciful servant is to call upon people to show mercy to others, as God has to them.

Forgiveness is a matter of conduct and mercy. The Jews taught that a man was to forgive another three times, but not the fourth. Peter more than doubled this and asked whether forgiveness was to be exercised to such a great extent. We should not limit our forgiveness to any fixed number of times. As often as a brother injures us and asks forgiveness, we are to forgive him. It is his duty to ask forgiveness. If he does this, it is our duty to declare that we forgive him and to treat him accordingly, in a forgiving manner. If he does not ask us to forgive him, we are still not at liberty to retaliate with revenge and malice; we still have to treat him kindly and mercifully. Although it is our Christian duty to forgive others, it is not easy. In fact, it is down right difficult.

Let us take a closer look at the parable of the unforgiving/unmerciful servant.

Matthew 18:21-26 Then Peter came to Him and said, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?" Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven. Therefore the kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. And when he had begun to settle accounts, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. But as he was not able to pay, his master commanded that he be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and that payment be made. The servant therefore fell down before him, saying, 'Master, have patience with me, and I will pay you all.'"

The phrase *the kingdom of heaven* in verse 23 represents the government of God, including His church; and God deals with the members of His church as this king did with his servants. No matter how we look at it, the debt of the servant was an enormous sum. We are called to emulate God's compassion. Since the servant with such a debt

had no assets, his master commanded all that he had to be sold, including his wife and children. By the ancient customs, they were permitted to sell debtors, with their wives and children, into servitude for a time sufficient to pay a debt.

In this case, because the servant fell down before him in a seemingly humble and earnest manner, entreating him to have patience with him, the king had pity on him. He saw his distressed condition, had compassion on his family, and forgave him the whole debt. God's forgiveness of repentant human beings is an act of mercy and compassion that we are to emulate. We owe God more than we can repay. You will notice here an underlying principle that the king may have known that that servant was not genuine in his act of repentance and humility, but he still forgave him. If a person comes to us, we cannot read his heart; and if he asks forgiveness, we should extend it to him. If he is not being genuine, then we leave that up to God to repay justly.

Matthew 18:27-30 "Then the master of that servant was moved with compassion, released him, and forgave him the debt. But that servant went out and found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii; and he laid hands on him and took him by the throat, saying, 'Pay me what you owe!' So his fellow servant fell down at his feet and begged him, saying, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you all.' And he would not, but went and threw him into prison till he should pay the debt."

The receipt of forgiveness will not always produce good fruit in the forgiven person. However, that is not for us to judge. The heartlessness of the forgiven one and his utter disregard of his obligation to emulate the gracious example of his king is sin. The offenses that our brethren commit against us are very small and insignificant compared with our offenses against God. Since God has forgiven us so much, we ought to forgive each other not just the small offenses, but all. The hard-hearted servant forgot that grace bestowed lays the receiver under an obligation to manifest at least the same grace. Even though the servant received forgiveness it did not guarantee that he would be a better person, as the deceived world generally believes today with its leniency on murderers, rapists, and thieves who receive light sentences.

Matthew 18:31-35 "So when his fellow servants saw what had been done, they were very grieved, and came and told their master all that had been done. Then his master, after he had called him, said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you begged me. Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant, just as I had pity on you?' And his master was angry, and delivered him to the torturers until he should

pay all that was due to him. So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses."

Even though a brother coming to us may not be genuine or humble, we have to forgive all that he asks us to forgive. From this parable, we learn several principles. I have listed five, which is the number of grace.

1. Our sins are great.
2. God abundantly forgives.
3. The offenses committed against us by our brethren are comparatively small.
4. We should abundantly forgive as our Master does.
5. If we do not, God will be justly angry with us and punish us.

Ultimately, our receipt of the mercy and compassion of God is contingent upon our forgiving treatment of others. We have nothing to pay toward our indebtedness. Therefore, God's forgiveness of our sins is nothing less than a gift, and that gift is on the foundation of the finished work of Christ — the King. It is on Jesus Christ that God can abolish our spiritually bankrupt state of debt.

James closely reflects the doctrine of mercy in the gospel through the writing of his epistle. Once again, we find very clear images of mercy. Such merciful actions as

- caring for the fatherless and helping the widow. James 1:27 "Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world."
- respecting the poor, feeding the hungry and clothing the naked. Taking care of those who are in genuine need.

James 2:1-13 My brethren, do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with partiality. For if there should come into your assembly a man with gold rings, in fine apparel, and there should also come in a poor man in filthy clothes, and you pay attention to the one wearing the fine clothes and say to him, "You sit here in a good place," and say to the poor man, "You stand there," or, "Sit here at my footstool," have you not shown partiality among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts? Listen, my beloved brethren: Has God not chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him? But you have dishonored the poor man. Do not the rich oppress you and

drag you into the courts? Do they not blaspheme that noble name by which you are called? If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you do well; but if you show partiality, you commit sin, and are convicted by the law as transgressors. For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all. For He who said, "Do not commit adultery," also said, "Do not murder." Now if you do not commit adultery, but you do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. So speak and so do as those who will be judged by the law of liberty. For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.

From a "duty" standpoint, the consideration of our being judged by the word of God should prod us to be more merciful in our duty toward and interaction with the poor, the less advantaged, and the weak. Notice three important things here in verse 13,

1. The judgment that will be passed on unrepentant sinners in the end will be a sentence without mercy.
2. Those who show no mercy now will find no mercy in the great day of final judgment.
3. On the other hand, there will be those who will become the epitome of the triumph of mercy. Those in whom there is mercy will rejoice against judgment because they will have received mercy rather than judgment. Mercy triumphs over judgment.

Those who do not exercise themselves in works of love and mercy toward the needy will receive no mercy at the hand of God. He says, "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy."

The unmerciful therefore are cursed, and they obtain no mercy. Those are terrifying statements.

In verse 13, James' statement, "Mercy triumphs over judgment" can be understood in several ways. I have five here, which, again, is the number of grace.

1. The merciful man exults over judgment. That is, he is not afraid of it, having acted according to the law of liberty, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."
2. You shall be exalted by mercy above judgment.

3. He (God) exalts mercy above judgment.
4. A merciful man rejoices in opportunities of showing mercy, rather than in acting according to strict justice.
5. In the great judgment day, though justice might condemn everyone according to the rigor of the law, yet God will cause "mercy to triumph over judgment" in bringing those into His glory who, for His sake, had fed the hungry, clothed the naked, and ministered to the sick.

The first priority is those of the household of God who fall under these general categories. References to humans showing mercy are statistically insignificant compared to the abundance of biblical passages that ascribe merciful behavior to God. We see examples of God's mercy in scripture.

Mercy is one of God's most generous attributes, and His merciful behavior is among the actions in which biblical writers most noticeably rejoice and about which they become excited. While God's mercy encompasses all of His benevolent acts toward His creation, if we trace the references to God's mercy, two areas dominate: God's acts of providence by which he sustains his vulnerable creatures, and his forgiveness of sins. Those are the two overwhelming categories in ways that God's mercy is represented in scripture. This is a way of saying that God's provision for the physical needs of people is a merciful act, as is His provision for their spiritual welfare.

God is "merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness," as Psalm 103:8 says. We see a similar passage in Exodus 34:

Exodus 34:6-7 And the LORD passed before him and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children's children to the third and the fourth generation."

Thus we see an example of balanced mercy. God's mercy does not mean that He overlooks or cancels the penalty for sin. He can extend mercy but there is still justice that has to be extended, as well, and they have to go hand in hand.

Again, God can be described as being "rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us," making us "alive together with Christ" as Paul explains.

Ephesians 2:4-5 But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved).

The Greek word that is translated *mercy* here is *e/leos*. The apostle Paul makes an interesting comparison here between the coarse rebellion of human beings in their rejection of God and God's gracious acceptance of the members of His church made possible by being in Christ. We know that God cannot approve of sin if He is to remain righteous; nevertheless, God is not unsympathetic toward those He has created even though they be sinners. He loves us and has made possible our reconciliation to Himself. Had He decided to destroy His disobedient children, He would have been entirely justified; and nothing could have prevented the tragedy.

Instead, love leads to mercy. Because of God's compassion for the helpless, He takes action to provide relief for them. This same classical Greek word *e/leos* that is translated *mercy* can be used regarding human beings; but in the New Testament, it has a special reference to what God does in Christ. There is an inexhaustible abundance of such mercy available in God, as we just read in verses 4 and 5. This side of God's character is expressed in the description "Father of mercies."

II Corinthians 1:3 "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort."

Mercy comes according to God's will. Among Paul's several images of mercy we find an emphasis on God's freedom in dispensing mercy to whom He wills. God Himself decides to whom He will extend that mercy. Here we see the direct comparison of Israel's rejection and God's justice:

Romans 9:14-15 What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? Certainly not! For He says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion."

Mercy is the aspect of God's love that causes Him to help the miserable, just as grace is the aspect of His love that moves Him to forgive the guilty. Those who are miserable may be so either because of breaking God's law or because of circumstances beyond their control. God shows mercy upon those who have broken His law although such

mercy is selective, demonstrating that it is not deserved. God's mercy on the miserable extends beyond punishment that is withheld. Withheld punishment may suspend a person's due, but it does not give him salvation. God also shows mercy by actively helping those who are miserable due to circumstance beyond their control, and we especially see this aspect of mercy in the life of Jesus Christ. He healed the blind and the lepers. These acts of healing grew out of His attitude of compassion and mercy and also for His desire to glorify God the Father. Our motivation for showing mercy on others should be to glorify God, not to glorify ourselves.

Romans 9:16-24 So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy. For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, "For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I may show My power in you, and that My name may be declared in all the earth." Therefore He has mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills He hardens. You will say to me then, "Why does He still find fault? For who has resisted His will?" But indeed, O man, who are you to reply against God? Will the thing formed say to him who formed it, "Why have you made me like this?" Does not the potter have power over the clay, from the same lump to make one vessel for honor and another for dishonor? What if God, wanting to show His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, and that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had prepared beforehand for glory, even us whom He called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles?

We see there that we cannot say, "God is being fair to that person or being more merciful to that person than He is to me." We do not know the whole story, and God wills mercy to whom He will. We have no involvement in that, per se, as far as deciding to whom God will extend mercy; although we can ask for mercy in our prayers for individuals, and God many times hears us. However, it is God's will that will be done, not ours. Men and women are receptacles of this divine mercy. While some are "vessels of wrath made for destruction," others are "vessels of mercy, which He has prepared beforehand for glory."

In Hebrews, Christ is the "merciful and faithful high priest" who became "like His brothers in every way."

Hebrews 2:14-18 Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those

who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. For indeed He does not give aid to angels, but He does give aid to the seed of Abraham. Therefore, in all things He had to be made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted.

Mercy is the act of not administering justice when that justice is disciplinary. Because of our sinfulness, we deserve death and complete separation from God, but God provided atonement for sin and through it shows us mercy. He does not deliver to the true Christian the natural consequence of the final death for his sin. Jesus became sin on our behalf and bore the punishment due us in order to deliver us from eternal death. God is in the process of saving us according to His mercy, and as members of His church we can practice mercy as a gift.

Romans 12:6-8 Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith; or ministry, let us use it in our ministering; he who teaches, in teaching; he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.

Paul tells us here that there is a time when mercy has to be shown and it has to be shown with gracious kindness. It is possible to forgive in such a way that the very forgiveness is an insult. It is possible to forgive and at the same time to demonstrate an attitude of criticism and contempt. There is a way of forgiving a person that pushes him further into the gutter, and there is a way of forgiving him that lifts him out of the mud. Real forgiveness is always based on love and never on superiority. If mercy is extended from a superior attitude then it is only going to hurt and not help.

The most important fact about mercy in the Bible is that it is almost wholly the domain of God, but there are also references to human displays of mercy. Mercy is to be a function of Jesus' disciples, not of the specific situation that calls it forth. The reward is not mercy shown by others but by God. This does not mean that our mercy is the underlying position of God's mercy but its occasional position. God does not always extend His mercy to us through others, although sometimes He does. However, it is still God extending His mercy.

One of Jesus' well-known beatitudes emphasizes that the showing of mercy is a

characteristic of godly behavior, accompanied by the promise that those who are merciful will be rewarded by obtaining God's mercy.

Matthew 5:7 Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.

The meek mentioned in verse 5 are also merciful, because to be meek is to acknowledge to others that we have been sinners. To be merciful is to have compassion on others who are sinners, too. You see how meekness and mercy go hand in hand.

Barnes' Notes Commentary has this to say about verse 7:

"[Blessed are the merciful.] That is, those who are so affected by the sufferings of others as to be disposed to alleviate them. This is given as an evidence of piety, and it is said that they who show mercy to others shall obtain it. The same sentiment is found in Matt. 10:42: "Whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only, in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you he shall in no wise lose his reward"...This should be done with a wish to glorify God; that is, in obedience to his commandments, and with a desire that he should be honored, and with a feeling that we are benefiting one of his creatures. Then he will regard it as done to him, and will reward us."

The apostle Paul calls love "the bond of perfection" in Colossians 3:14. This should strongly encourage us to be merciful to our brethren, even to those who have been offensive to us. We should do this not only because God is merciful to others but because He is merciful to us. Even though we have been—and still are, at times—unthankful, it is because of His mercies that we are not consumed. We must really concentrate on extending mercy to others.

In Jesus we find the mercy of God embodied and displayed in action. This divine mercy is found in the several instances where, faced with crowds or specific human needs, Jesus had compassion for people because they were harassed and or helpless.

Matthew 9:35-38 Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people. But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd. Then He said to His

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disciples, "The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest."

We see there that Jesus did extend compassion and mercy to those who were weary and scattered in the world. They did not have a shepherd and did not know what direction to go to understand God's way of life.

Here the term for *compassion* in Greek literally means, "to be moved in one's bowels." If we were expressing it in English we might say, "His heart went out to the people," or "they broke His heart." This is the attitude that we should have in extending mercy to others, from the heart and not only from the mind, so to speak. We can then view each story of exorcism, healing, and forgiveness by Jesus as a small part of divine mercy. God's mercy is extended to the afflicted, the needy, the poor, and the sinners of Israel.

The primary facets of God's mercy are seen in the work of Jesus as He forgives, delivers, and restores. The restoration promised by the prophets is at hand and moving in a quiet and mysterious way among the people of the church of God. In the course of our lives, there is so much mercy that God extends to us that we do not even notice; but we should take note of this mercy extended to us as much as possible.

Mercy is closely related to compassion in action. It is a virtue that inspires us with compassion for others and inclines us to assist people in their needs. It is not enough that acts of mercy proceed from a desire in human beings toward humanity, but they must be performed for the glory of God and with a genuinely meek and humble motive if they are to be acceptable to Him.

The Greek word from which *compassion* is derived means literally "from the bowels," referring to the gut feeling we get about someone or something. Mercy, therefore, is both feeling compassion and acting upon it. It has a passive and an active sense to it.

Our best biblical picture of it is seen in the integrity of the good Samaritan in Jesus' parable. Luke 10:33 and 37 tells us regarding the Samaritan that he "had compassion" and then acted decisively as benefactor to the wounded traveler by the roadside. This action identifies the Samaritan as having shown mercy to the wounded man but also as having crossed the huge abyss of hostility between the Samaritans and Jews. The mercy that he demonstrated came as a result of his right attitude of loving his neighbor; he was impartial.

The Hebrew word *hesed* is often translated "mercy," but it is also translated as

"lovingkindness" and "goodness." There we see other elements of mercy. *Mercy* occurs approximately 150 times in the English translations of the Bible, and *compassion* has about fifty references. Regardless of the Hebrew and Greek backdrop, if we look at the passages where mercy and compassion occur in the Bible, the common definition is accurate: "Mercy is aid rendered to someone who is miserable or needy, especially someone who is either in debt or without claim to favorable treatment." That is, he does not have access to help.

In a more general sense, showing mercy is the action of helping someone in need who is unable or incapable of helping himself. We have seen that we are commanded to "be merciful"; that is, to behave in such a way as to emulate God himself. Jesus said:

Luke 6:36 "Therefore be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful."

Jesus' command, "Be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful" helps explain Matthew 5:48, where Jesus says, "You shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect." Being merciful is part of being perfect. However, the Pharisees believed that being perfect meant following only the letter of the law. They did not see the important aspect and characteristic of being perfect in that of mercy. Taking the inspired written word of God as a whole package, we are told to imitate our heavenly Father in all His attributes. Therefore, those who are merciful as God is merciful, even to the evil and the unthankful, are living their lives as God lives His.

We must be merciful as our Father in heaven is merciful. Christ raises the requirement to another whole new level when He says that we must love our enemies.

Luke 6:27-36 "But I say to you who hear: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, and pray for those who spitefully use you. To him who strikes you on the one cheek, offer the other also. And from him who takes away your cloak, do not withhold your tunic either. Give to everyone who asks of you. And from him who takes away your goods do not ask them back. And just as you want men to do to you, you also do to them likewise. But if you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. And if you lend to those from whom you hope to receive back, what credit is that to you? For even sinners lend to sinners to receive as much back. But love your enemies, do good, and lend, hoping for nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the

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Most High. For He is kind to the unthankful and evil. Therefore be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful."

In verse 36, the word *merciful* refers to "showing and having compassion for." When verse 36 is taken in context with verses 27-35, the word refers to gifts and deeds; for example, being a doer of merciful deeds.

When verse 36 is connected with verse 37—"Judge not, and you shall not be judged. Condemn not, and you shall not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven"—the word implies kindness and forbearance in judgment. We see that, depending on how you connect or attach the word *mercy* within the context, it gives us two wonderful principles that we should remember: One, that it refers to gifts and deeds; that is, to be a doer of merciful deeds. On the other hand, it refers to kindness and forbearance in judgment.

Merciful here in verse 36 is similar to *compassionate*: to give place, to yield because we eagerly give up those things that are necessary for those with whom we sympathize. Just as God is always anxious to give any and all necessary help and support to those who are miserable or in need, so also we, His followers who have the same spirit, are anxious to contribute as much as possible to relieve or remove the miseries of distressed people.

A merciful and compassionate person overlooks wrongs done to him. He dutifully provides the offender with relief and does not permit repeated returns of ingratitude to deter him from doing good, even to the unthankful and the unholy. The reason for this is that mercy is an expression of love. It is a form of love determined by the state or condition of those toward whom it is directed. Their state is one of suffering and need, while at the same time they may be unworthy or ill-deserving. Mercy is naturally the expression of love toward those who are in no condition to repay the kindly and compassionate act of love for their relief.

God is the Father of mercies, and His compassion is over all that He has made. It is because of His mercy that we are in the process of being saved. Jesus was often moved with compassion, and He encourages us—even commands us—to be merciful, as our Father also is merciful. We are to put on heartfelt compassion from which we will receive abundant blessings and mercy.

What a wonderful blessing and encouragement it is that it is God's pleasure and it is God's will that "mercy triumphs over judgment"!